

The Faith of Our Fathers

Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios

Outstanding scholar, theologian, philosopher, polyglot and man of letters. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios sought to bring together in a holistic vision, several unrelated disciplines like philosophy, economics, political science, medicine, education, physics and theology.

Born in 1922 at Tripunithura, Kerala, the great scholar-bishop had his earlier stints in his homestate as a journalist and postal service employee. He proceeded to Ethiopia in 1947 accepting the job of a teacher there and in course of time became the Special Secretary to Emperor Haillie Sellasi. He had an exceptional educational career in Yale, Princeton and Oxford Universities. Returning to Kerala, he was ordained as a priest of the Orthodox Church. In 1967 Fr. Paul Verghese became the Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 1975, he was elevated as a bishop. Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios took charge of the Delhi Diocese of the Orthodox Church in July 1975.

Honours came unsought to Mar Gregorios. He had the good fortune to be the President of the World Council of Churches and the Indian Philosophical Congress. In 1988, he received the Soviet Land Nehru Award. His Grace travelled widely and showed an unusual intellectual courage to explore new paradigms in human thinking. He was visiting professor in several universities like the J. N. U. in New Delhi. The philosopher-bishop passed away on 24th November 1996 and his mortal remains lie entombed in the Orthodox Seminary Chapel, Kottayam.

Mar Gregorios has authored more than 50 books. *The Joy of Freedom, Freedom of Man, The Cosmic Man, The Human Presence, Enlightenment East and West, A Light Too Bright* and the spiritual autobiography *Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery* are some of the most remarkable among these. Hundreds of his articles and lectures have been published in leading newspapers, and international magazines.

The Faith of Our Fathers

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

Gregory of India Study Centre
'Sophia', Thirunakkara, Kottayam-686001

The Faith of Our Fathers

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

First Edition: 1969

Second Edition: October 1996

First Web Edition: December 2015

Published by Joice Thottackad on behalf of Gregory of India Study Centre
for the glory of God and for the benefit of humankind.

Type Setting: Sophia Print House, Kottayam

Introduction

This little pamphlet has but a modest goal. It is intended primarily for University students, especially members of the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement. Others may benefit from it - given sympathetic understanding.

There is no way of understanding Christianity without understanding the Fathers. The Bible is essential and primary, but not sufficient by itself. These men embodied in their lives and teachings elements of the faith which one without acquaintance with the authentic tradition cannot easily discern in the Bible.

The Bible, the Liturgy, the Fathers - these three form a complex unity. Any of these cannot be understood without some knowledge of the other two.

This pamphlet is meant only to begin to cultivate a taste for the Fathers. Students will have to do much more work once their interest has been quickened.

Three things characterized the Fathers - a dedicated life with an intense discipline of prayer, worship and fasting, a singular capacity to combine wide and deep secular knowledge with knowledge of the ways of God and an infinite and active compassion for the poor and the needy and a willingness to serve them.

We need the same combination in today's world and Church if mankind is to find its way forward. College students should at least have an opportunity to become exposed to the personality, life and thought of some of these spiritual giants of the past.

Several small pamphlets are to follow, if God wills, this slender publication.

This is not intended to be scholarly or pedantic. If it dispels at least one or two misconceptions about the Fathers of the Church, the author would feel satisfied.

Fr. Paul Verghese

Kottayam, Kerala
Epiphany, 1969.

CONTENTS

Introduction

- I The Fathers of the Church
- II The Apostolic Fathers and Other Pre-Nicene Fathers
- III The Golden Age of the Fathers
- IV St. Athanasius
- V Mar Baselius of Caesarea
- VI Mar Gregorios of Nazianzus
- VII Mar Gregorios of Nyssa
- VIII Mar Ivanios the Golden - Mouthed
- IX Mar Kurilos Of Alexandria

I

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

1. Who are the Fathers of the Church?

The term has no precise definition in the Orthodox tradition. It is usually applied to all the great doctors (malpans) and saintly leaders of the Church.

In the Roman Catholic Church there is a precise term Doctor of the Church, which the Pope officially confers on some great teacher of the past as occasion arises. They have more than 20 *doctores ecclesiae*. The four most important doctors for the Roman Catholic Church are Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome.

These are not regarded as official teachers of the Church by the universal tradition of the Church which we follow. Most of the errors of the Catholic and Protestant traditions can be traced back to these doctors.

On the other hand, some of the doctors whom they have recently accepted have always been the formers and shapers of our tradition. For example in 1920, the Pope declared St. Ephrem as a “Doctor of the Church.” He was always a towering figure for the Eastern tradition, both Greek and Non - Greek. The particular occasion for the Pope’s officially declaring St. Ephrem as a doctor of the Church was the need to use him as authority for certain doctrines about the Blessed Virgin Mary, which the Catholic Church wanted to declare officially. They thought that some of the passages in his poems about the Blessed Virgin being spotless (lomumo in Syriac can mean immaculate in Latin) could be used to support the doctrine of Immaculate Conception.

The Eastern tradition cannot exalt an ancient father according to need. It is only the consensus of the Church’s tradition that so exalts a father as an authoritative guide into Christian truth.

Some whom the Roman Church regards as Fathers have to be regarded as heretics by the universal tradition, which the Eastern Church follows.

For example Origen was a great scholar. He was the head of the *famous* Theological Institute in Alexandria in the 3rd century. A prodigious genius of towering proportions, he seems to have written some 3000 books. He was a great Biblical scholar, but freely used allegorical interpretation of the Bible and unbridled philosophical speculation, which led him into several errors. He is supposed to have believed in metempsychosis (*punarjanma*) and the pre-existence of all souls. He died about 254 A.D.

His teaching was condemned as heretical by the Church of Alexandria in 400 A.D. The Roman and Syrian Churches agreed with the decision of Alexandria.*

The Greeks condemned Origen a century and a half later at the Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. The Pope supported this decision.

Despite this, it is seen that Anglicans and Roman Catholics cite Origen as authority for certain doctrines.

Equally to be questioned is the authority of Tertullian, a North African lawyer (ca A.D. 160-220). Along with Augustine, Tertullian is regarded as an authority for doctrines of the Trinity and the

* Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that some of our great fathers have spoken very highly of Origen. St. Gregory Thaumarturgus, St. Dionysius of Alexandria, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Didymus and many others have indulged in the most unstinting praise of his intellect and sanctity. St. Athanasius defended his Orthodoxy. And yet we have to be careful in following his speculations. Whatever is good in him is now to be found in the Cappodocian Fathers and St. Athanasius. They are safe filters through which to assimilate the better elements of his prodigious genius.

Incarnation. The universal tradition has not accepted their teachings, and since these men are the sources of many of the errors of western legalistic - individualistic teaching, the eastern tradition has been rather careful about not using them as authority for the faith of the Church.

The question then, “who are the Fathers of the church” cannot be too easily answered. We shall however try to give a minimum list towards the end of this chapter.

2. How did the Term “Father” Originate?

The Protestant tradition in general detests the word Father as applied to the great teachers of the Church. Neither do they like to address the priests of the Church as Father. They reserve this title to the heavenly Father and to one’s earthly father.

But not entirely. Even the most radical American Protestants use expressions like “Pilgrim Fathers” and “Founding Fathers.” The former expression, at least since the 18th century is used for the “pilgrims” who came to America from Europe in the ship “Mayflower” in 1620 and established the colony of Plymouth in Massachusetts.

In the Church, the name Father seems to have been used for bishops from the beginning of Christian history. The word *papa* (Pope) which means “father” was originally used for all bishops. In Arabic *papa* became *baba* and from it the Syrians got the word *bava* which we use often for our Father in heaven (ആകാശത്തിലുള്ള ഞങ്ങളുടെ ബാവ), for the Patriarch and Catholicos (പാത്രിയർക്കീസ് ബാവ, കാതോലിക്കാ ബാവ).

The term “Father” as applied to abbots of monasteries is also very ancient (Because the monks regarded the abbot or *Reesh-dairo* as their bishop, superior and spiritual father, he was called *abba* (*daddy* or Father) and the word *abbot* literally means father.

The use of the term for ordinary priests began only in the 19th century, and was imported from England. In Europe as well as in

the East, monks who were specially qualified to be spiritual counsellors and to hear confessions were called “Father confessors,” or spiritual fathers (“ghostly fathers” in medieval English; *yenafs abbat* in the Ethiopian language).

Later, when it became the habit for all priests to hear confessions, it was applied to all priests in Ireland, and the practice spread in England in the latter half of the 19th century. In Kerala we probably adopted this practice from the Anglo-Catholics.

But the use of the term ‘Father’ in a more restricted sense as applying to the great teachers of the Church dates from the 4th century. The 318 bishops who participated in the first ecumenical synod of Nicea were referred to by their successors as “the Fathers of Nicea” or “the 318 Fathers.” The term referred to their special authority in matters of doctrine.

Later on, St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, still in the 4th century, in their disputes with the heretics, used other “fathers” as authority to prove the right doctrine. In Chalcedon “the faith of the Fathers” became a synonym for the true faith and both sides in the debates used the authority of St. Cyril to prove their point.

3. Who was the Last Father?

This question is difficult to answer. The Roman Catholic Church defined a Father as characterized by four things - Orthodoxy of doctrine, holiness of life, the approval of the Church, and antiquity.

The Roman Catholics have a very large list of Fathers, and their last Father in the West was Isidore of Seville (died 636) and in the East John of Damascus (d. 749). The Greeks also close their patristic period with the last of their seven council’s (787), i.e. with John of Damascus.

For our tradition the patristic period comes to a close a little earlier, judging by the list of Fathers commemorated in the intercessory prayers (*thoob-den*) of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The

last fathers mentioned in the fifth Thoobden is Mar James of Edessa who died in 708 and Mar Isaac of Nineveh who died in 700 A.D.

But there is no reason why the list should be finally closed there. We shall here adopt a different scheme, which will leave the patristic period still open and not concluded.

4. Four Groups of Fathers

For the sake of convenience in study, we shall divide the Fathers into four groups.

- (a) The Apostolic and Pre - nicene Fathers.
- (b) The Fathers of the three Ecumenical councils.
- (c) The post - conciliar Fathers.
- (d) The Monastic Fathers.

The Apostolic fathers were direct disciples of the Apostles like Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp of Smyrna.

Among the other pre-nicene Fathers we include the fathers of the second and third centuries like Clement of Alexandria, Ireneus of Lyons etc.

By Fathers of the Three Ecumenical councils we mean not only those bishops and teachers who took part in the Synods of Nicea (325) Ephesus (381) and Constantinople (431) but also the Fathers who lived and taught during the period 300-450 even if they were not present at the councils.

By post - conciliar Fathers we mean those who were teachers of the universal Church (Malponie-de-thibel), who belong to the true faith. Outside this category there are some teachers who are fathers for the Greek and Latin Churches, but who are not authoritative for us like Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, and much later, Gregory Palamas.

By monastic fathers we mean the developers of the great ascetic tradition of the Church i.e. St. Antony, St. Pachomius, St. Makarios, St. Simeon Stylites, St. Ephrem and so on.

II

The Apostolic Fathers and Other Pre - nicene Fathers

The title Apostolic Fathers was created only in the 17th century in the course of the debate between the Reformation (Protestant) and the Counter - Reformation (Roman Catholic). The term is often rather loosely applied to all writings of the period immediately following the age of the apostles. More strictly, Apostolic fathers are the direct disciples of one or more of the Twelve Apostles.

Among those now regarded as Apostolic Fathers in the western Churches are the following:

1. St. Clement of Rome

Flourished around A.D. 96. He was the third bishop in Rome, and was probably a disciple of both Peter and Paul. If he is the one referred to in Philippians 4:3, then Clement was a co-worker of St. Paul.

2. St. Ignatius of Antioch (Ca 35 - Ca 107 A.D.)

He was the third bishop of Antioch, the first having been St. Peter himself. A disciple of Peter, Paul, John and the other Apostles who were in Antioch, he is a great father, not only of the Syrian tradition, but of the whole universal Church. He was martyred in Rome by being thrown to wild animals.

3. Hermas (2nd century)

Very little is known of this Father except through his interesting book "The Shepherd." He was a rich man who once denied the Lord, did penance and was reinstated, His book was almost regarded as scripture by the ancient Church and was widely used for the instruction of candidates for baptism.

4. St. Polycarp (ca 69 - ca 155)

The Bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor, he was probably a disciple of St. John who spent his last years in Ephesus. He was burnt to death at the age of 86 for refusing to deny his faith.

The importance of these fathers for understanding the tradition of the Church is enormous.

In the first place they make it very clear that there were many things which the Apostles taught the leaders of the Churches established by them and which do not appear in the New Testament. The authority of these apostolic fathers witness to the fact that only a portion, albeit the most important portion, of the Apostolic tradition was actually written down in the New Testament.

A few questions from these fathers will show their importance for understanding the true Apostolic teaching, which cannot be got from the Bible alone:

“Since we have gazed into the depths of divine knowledge, we are bound to perform in due order all that the master bade us accomplish at their proper reasons. He ordered that the qurbanas (*prosphas* in Greek) and services (*leitourgias*) should be performed at their appointed times and seasons, not at random and without order, and also by his own supreme will he himself settled where and by whom these are to be performed, so that all might be done in a holy manner and be pleasing and acceptable to his will. For they who make their qurbanas at the appointed times are pleasing to him and blessed, for they do not transgress in following that which was ordained by the Lord. To the Archpriest (bishop) is appointed a special liturgical service, the priests have a special place reserved for them, and the levites have their own deaconate, to the men of the people (laity) are ascribed functions

appropriate to the laity. “Clement of Rome. *I Epistle to the Corinthians* 40 (About A.D. 96). And again “And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop’s office. So for this reason, since they had perfect fore-knowledge they appointed the above - mentioned (bishops and deacons) and later laid down a rule so that if there men die, other approved men can succeed to their liturgical office.”

Ibid para XLIV.

The following passage is from the epistle of St. Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans (VIII):

“Flee from divisions, as the beginning of evil. Follow, all of you, the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father; and follow the priesthood (presbytery) as the Apostles. Moreover, reverence the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no man do anything related to the life of the Church apart from the bishop. Let that Eucharist be regarded as valid which is under the bishop or his delegate. Whenever the bishop is seen, there let the people also be; even as wherever Jesus Christ is, there the Catholic Church also is. It is not permitted either to baptize or to hold an agape - festival apart from the bishop. That which he approves, this is pleasing to God also, so let all your practices be secure and valid.”

In his epistle to the Philadelphians, he affirms that this was not one of his own ideas, but that the spirit of God constantly urged him, so that in the assembly he spoke by the prophetic power of the Holy spirit (not in an unknown tongue): “Give heed unto the bishop and presbytery and deacons.”

On the question of the place of the Holy Eucharist in the Church,

the Bible does not give us adequate information about what the Apostles taught. We learn a great deal about it from St. Ignatius, and the document called the Didache, which contains the clear teaching of the Apostles in this regard.

Christian heretics who did not respect the Eucharist were common in the very times of the Apostles. They claimed that they were “spiritual” and therefore did not need “material” sacraments. By the same token they denied the flesh of our Lord. They held that Jesus Christ was God, but that his flesh was only an appearance. Hence they are called Docetists (from *dokeo* - to seem). St. Ignatius says about them:

“They (the Docetists) hold aloof from the Eucharist and the common prayer, because they do not acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, and whom the Father in his loving kindness raised from the dead.”

(Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 7)

If that is what the disciples of the Apostles taught, then those who today deny that the Eucharist is the very body and blood of our Lord have also gone astray from the Apostolic tradition. Here is another quotation from St. Ignatius’ epistle to the Philadelphians (iv):

“Take care to hold but one Eucharist. For one is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there is only one cup of His blood for our unity; One *madbeha* (place of sacrifice), and one bishop with the priests (presbyters) and deacons; my fellow-servants, so that all that you do may be done according to God.”

*

*

*

*

*

The Didache, or to give its full title, “The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles”, is now believed to be a

very ancient document, older than several of the books of the present New Testament. Though English writers usually place it in the early second century, recent Catholic scholarship in France has established its date around 60 A.D.

This book contains some notes of the disciples of the Apostles as to how they were to baptize and to celebrate the Eucharist. It concludes:

“On the Lord’s day, assemble together and break bread and give thanks, first making public confession of your faults, that your sacrifice may be pure. If any man has a quarrel with a friend, let him not join your assembly until they are reconciled. So that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice spoken of by the Lord: “In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice” (Mal. 1:11, 14).

“Appoint therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord; kindly men, who are not greedy for money, men who are genuine and tested...” (Didache XIV, XV).

It is clear from these that those who today deny that the Eucharist is a sacrifice, and those who do not have bishops and deacons, do not follow the Apostolic teaching.

*

*

*

*

*

Among the pre-nicene fathers we should mention a whole school of great teachers who flourished in Asia Minor, present Turkey. The theology of the universal Christian Church was shaped mainly in three centers - Antioch, Alexandria and Asia. There are few Greeks and Latin’s who have contributed very much to the development of the authentic tradition. Most of those who are known as Greek Fathers came from Asia or Africa.

Melito of Sardis was one of these great Asian Fathers. In the

Syrian and Greek Churches still bishops are named after him (Mar Malatios / Meliton). He is known to have written many books, most of which are lost to us, except a sermon on Easter, and a few small fragments.

More important is Ireneus, the great Asian theologian of the second century. He came from Smyrna and was a disciple of the great martyr-bishop Polycarp (155). He left Asia for Rome and Lyons (France) and thus took the Asian tradition to the west. He evangelized France and became bishop of that country. His works were used by Augustine more than two centuries later, as a basis for his own doctrinal writings. Ireneus was widely used in Syria and Armenia at one time.

His greatest contribution to our faith lies perhaps in the area of understanding what Tradition itself is.

Tradition is the continuing stream of the mind of the Church. Ireneus has clarified for us the meaning of this apostolic tradition. Certain heretics had claimed "Apostolic succession" for their own errors, by pretending that they were the disciples of the disciples of the Apostles. Over against this false claim to "Apostolic succession" made by heretics. Ireneus lays down the true view of Apostolic Tradition. Since his treatment of the subject is too long to quote, we give below a summary.

The Apostles proclaimed the gospel to all, taught it to their disciples, and later reduced some of it to writing. "All and each of them was equally in possession of the gospel of God" - not just Peter. St. Mathew wrote down the Gospel in Hebrew. Mark recorded what St. Peter taught. Luke wrote down the gospel as St. Paul taught it. And finally St. John while resident in Ephesus (Asia) wrote down a version of his own. All tradition must agree with these four gospels; the heretics teach something different.

But when the heretics are refuted from the Gospels they say that the Bible is not final, and that there is a secret oral tradition, which

has been handed to them from the Apostles. The only way of testing these false claims to Apostolic tradition is to check them with what has been handed down from generation to generation in the Churches which the Apostles themselves established. None of the bishops whom the Apostles appointed taught the kind of rubbish the Gnostic heretics were teaching (it would be very useful to apply this test to many of the teachings of contemporary sects). If there was any secret teaching of the Apostles, they must have handed it down to those bishops to whom they had entrusted the Church.

There are so many apostolic Churches, where there is an unbroken line of apostolic succession. In Rome the teaching of St. Peter and St. Paul is maintained. The whole list of bishops from the Apostles to this day can be produced. There is a similar tradition in Asia, (which is the one in which Irenaeus himself grew up). In Smyrna Polycarp was taught by the Apostles, and was put in charge of the whole of Asia. "He always taught what he learned from the Apostles, which the Church continues to hand on, and which are the only truths. The Churches in Asia all bear witness to this, as do those who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time."

So with Ephesus, which Church St. Paul founded and where St. John taught. And now I quote:

"Since there are so many clear testimonies, we should not seek from others for the truth which can easily be received from the Church. There the Apostles, like a rich man making a deposit, fully bestowed upon her all that belongs to the truth, so that whoever wishes may receive from her the water of life. She is the entrance to life, all the others are thieves and robbers.* Therefore we ought to avoid them but to love with the greatest zeal the things of the Church, and so to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. What if there should be any dispute about some matter of moderate importance? Should we not turn to the oldest Churches, where the apostles

themselves were known, and find out from them the clear and certain answer to the problem now being raised? Even if the apostles had not left their writings to us, ought we not to follow the rule of the tradition, which they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches? Many barbarian people who believe in Christ follow this rule having (the message of their) salvation written in their hearts by the spirit without paper and ink. Diligently following the old tradition, they believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth and of all that is in them, through Christ Jesus the son of God, who on account of his abundant love for his creation submitted to be born of a Virgin, himself by himself uniting man to God, and having suffered under Pontius Pilate, and risen, and having been received up into splendour, is to come in glory as the Saviour of those who are saved, and the judge of those who are judged, and will send into eternal fire those who alter the truth and despise his Father and his coming. Those who believe in this faith without written documents are barbarians in our speech, but in their convictions, habits, and behaviour they are, because of their faith, most wise, and are pleasing to God, living in all righteousness and purity and wisdom. If any one should preach to them the inventions of the heretics, speaking in their own language, they would at once stop their ears and run far away not enduring even to listen to such blasphemous speech. So by that old tradition of the apostles they do not even take into their minds whatever their impressive words may mean.”

Against Heresies III, 4. Engl. Translation from Cyril Richardson, Ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Library of Christian Classics. Vol. 1, pp. 374-375).

Many things we learn from the disciples of the Apostles, which are not directly in the Bible.

First, on many fundamental questions of faith the Bible used by itself without knowledge of the Tradition of the Church can lead to heresy. All the early heretics used the Bible in one form or another. The Tradition of Christian truth can be found in its fullness only in the Church. No one can simply take the Bible and sit down and construct a faith out of it.

What the modern sects often present to us as Biblical truth is little more than their own particular tradition, which may be a local German or American or English or Dutch tradition of a few hundred years ago. Only in the Universal tradition of the Church can we learn the Christian truth and therefore also see the Bible in its true light.

We learn, however, also that the disciples of the Apostles had a very great respect for the Bible, and were very thorough in their knowledge of the Old Testament and the writings of their masters the Apostles. In the Orthodox tradition we have no reason to neglect the Bible. The more authentic knowledge of the bible we have the more truly Orthodox we become.

We learn also, how important the Church, the Priesthood, and the mysteries of the faith (the sacraments) were for the disciples of the Apostles. The denial of these realities and a dependence on the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) can be a great error. The faith is truly experienced and known only by membership in the Church, which has a responsible and properly apostolic ministry and a high tradition of the Christian mysteries. Outside that Church even the Bible becomes a snare and a stumbling block.

III

The Golden Age of the Fathers

The period from the Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325) to the Council of Chalcedon (451) has been called the Golden age of Eastern Patristic literature.

There are many reasons for this flourishing of Christian thought such as never took place before or after.

The official approval of Christianity by Emperor Constantine in 313 has sometimes been deplored by historians as the beginning of the decline of Christianity. It is true that the Christian Church was no longer persecuted and therefore there was no more opportunity to become martyrs. But martyrdom is not the only way of expressing the Christian faith.

Constantine's Edict of Milan placed the Church in a position where it had to take this world more seriously. Today we live in the same situation. It is not sufficient to think about the other world alone. We have to give expression to our faith here and now, in this world. The Church was forced to take an active and responsible role in politics, in culture and in education because of the Constantinian settlement. Previously the Church could condemn the Roman Empire as Babylon the harlot which persecutes the faithful. Now the Empire was in the hands of the Church, so to speak.

And it is in the context of this new situation that the Eastern Fathers developed their thought.

The new freedom for the Church also meant greater freedom for heresy. So the denial of Christ's deity and of the doctrine of the Trinity could come to the surface and gain support among the people and even with the Emperor. And the Church Fathers were able to clarify these doctrines without fear of the Emperor, even at the risk of their very lives. True thought, the right glorification of God, which is orthodoxy, thus became the new form of martyrdom.

It was also at this time that some of the most learned of men applied themselves to the clarification of Christian thought. What an Origen had attempted and failed in the time of persecution, Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers successfully achieved in the age of the Councils, since the debate could be open and public. Origen had no heretic or other person really to question his views. The Fathers of the golden age were constantly under fire from heretics and had to sharpen their thoughts on the anvil of controversy.

It can be said that true discussion of the most fundamental theological questions took place for the first time in the fourth century. And by the grace of God, there were a large number of learned and keen minds who could clarify the issues.

It is also true that there were, during this period, some important theological academies, which could both produce the scholars, and debate the issues at the same time. Chief among these was the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch. There were three other schools - one in Caesaria, the capital of Palestine (a daughter institution of Alexandria, started by Origen), and two Syrian schools in Edessa and Nisibis. There were no Church schools among the Greeks or Latins. Theology, even in the fourth and fifth century, was mainly a product of Asia and Africa, though most of the writing was in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the empire.

We do not have the space here to list all the important fathers or to summarize their teaching. We give below very brief sketches of six of the most important fathers of this period. Mar Athanasius, Mar Baeslios, Mar Gregorios Nazianzen, Mar Gregorios of Nyssa, Mar Ioannes Chrysostomos, and Mar Cyrillos of Alexandria.

Taking the entire period from 325-451, the following Fathers are of some importance, but we cannot deal with them here:

1. Alexander of Alexandria.
2. Mar Didymus the Blind.

3. Mar Theophilus of Alexandria.
4. Mar Eustathius of Antioch.
5. Mar Eusebius of Caesarea, the Church Historian.
6. Mar Kurillos of Jerusalem.
7. Mar Dioscurus of Alexandria.

In addition to these there were the Monastic Fathers, including St. Ephrem who will be treated in a later pamphlet. We are also omitting two great teachers of this period whose Orthodoxy is in question: namely Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus.

IV

St. Athanasius (Ca. 296 - 373)

One of the most heroic figures of the ancient Church, he fought the battle against the heresy of Arius almost single-handed. He attended the Council of Nicea (325) as Deacon and Secretary to the then bishop of Alexandria, Alexander. In 328, when Alexander died, he became bishop, or Pope of Alexandria (the Coptic Church). Because of his opposition to Arianism, he was exiled at least four times from Alexandria, after he became bishop - in 336 (till 337), in 339 (for seven years), in 356 (till 361) in 362 (till 363) and again in 365 (till 366). He died at Alexandria on the 2nd of May 373 A.D., before he could see the final victory of his theology at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

It was during his papacy that the Ethiopian king became a Christian along with all his subjects, through the work of Syrian missionaries.

He introduced monasticism into the west, where it seems to have been unknown before. His “life of St. Antony” is one of the classics of Monastic literature.

But most of his writings were directed against the heresy of Arius and in defense of the teaching of the Council of Nicea.

Though not a great classical scholar, his knowledge of the scriptures, his clear mind, and his skill in debate made him a formidable enemy of heretics. It is from his works against Arius that we learn what the heresiarch was teaching. But his greatest contribution is that he established for ever the true tradition of the Church that Jesus Christ is the son of God, unoriginate, uncreated, of the same essence with the father, God of God.

The two main articles of the Christian Faith are faith in the Holy Trinity and faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. In both matters Mar Athanasius laid the foundation of true understanding. Athanasius said clearly “God became man that man may become God.”

V

2. Mar Baselius of Caesarea (St. Basil, the Great - Ca. 330-379)

Mar Baselius, one of the towering giants of ancient Christianity, was an Asian by birth. He is one of the Cappodocian fathers. Cappodocia was a province of Asia (present - day Turkey). His parents lived in Caesarea, the capital of the province. It was a remarkable family. Mar Baselius' father the elder Basil, had five sons and five daughters. Three of the sons became bishops - Mar Baselius in Caesaria, Mar Gregorios in Nyssa and Mar Pethros in Sebaste. The eldest sister of Mar Baselius, Martha Makarina, deserves a chapter to herself, for she was both a saint and a scholar, the founder of monastic communities for women, and the teacher of her brothers who became bishops. Even as a bishop, says Mar Gregorios, he learned from his sister the great mysteries of the faith.

Mar Baselius was educated in the best pagan schools of his time, and was thus one of the most educated of his contemporaries. He studied first from his father and grandmother, who were themselves both great scholars. He then studied in his native Caesarea, then moved to Constantinople, and finally to Athens, the centre of all learning at that time.

After all his studies, which he completed with the greatest honours, he returned to his native Caesarea, proud as a peacock as his own brother says. He began his career as a rhetorician (secular professor) in his own native Caesarea, but as Mar Baselius himself says in his letter (no. 223).

“I had wasted much time on follies and spent nearly all my youth in vain labours, and devotion to the teachings of a wisdom that God has made foolish. Suddenly I awoke as out of a deep sleep. I beheld the wonderful

light of the Gospel truth, and I recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the princes of this world that was come to naught. I shed a flood of tears over my wretched life, and I prayed for a guide who might form in me the principles of piety.”

He was soon baptized, after having been duly instructed by his sister Makarina. He then travelled in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia to learn from the many monks who lived in these parts.

When he returned, he distributed his wealth among the poor (he was a very rich man) and went in to solitude for prayer and fasting. Soon others joined him, including his friend and classmate Mar Gregorios of Nazianzus, though only temporarily. The community grew and it became a great spiritual centre of Christianity in Asia. Mar Baselius wrote, in co-operation with Mar Gregorios Nazianzen, the rules for a monastic community. These rules are the basis for all eastern monasticism, and for some forms of western monasticism like that of the Benedictines.

In a short time he founded other monasteries, and his sister Makarina started a convent for women across the river from the men’s monastery.

Together they established hospitals for the sick, nursing homes for lepers, homes for the poor, hotels for travellers and strangers; and the monasteries soon became a spiritual city, where the poor and the destitute praised God for His wonderful ways.

In addition to his great learning and spirituality, St. Basil was, like Mar Athanasius, a man of very great personal courage. He stood up to the Emperor Valens when pressured to support the Arian heresy. When the Emperor sent his Viceroy to threaten Mar Baselius with confiscation of goods, torture and exile, Basil replied that he had nothing to be confiscated except a cloak and a few books, and as for exile, anywhere in the world would be his home. As for torture,

he said his body would give up its life at the first blow, and that Modestus the Viceroy would be doing him a favour by sending him off to God so quickly.

“Death would be an act of kindness, for it will bring me nearer to God, for whom I live, and for whom I have been created, ... and to whom I hasten.”

The pagan Modestus was surprised by this bold answer and said: “No one has spoken to me with such boldness before.” Mar Baselius replied:

“Perhaps you have never met a Christian bishop before. Fire, swords, beasts and the instruments for tearing the flesh we desire as delights rather than horrors. Afflict us, torture us, threaten, do all you can, enjoy your power, but let the Emperor also know that in no way can you win us over to embrace untruth, though you threaten with the cruellest deeds.”

That was the end of the Emperor’s opposition to Basil. Both the Emperor and the Viceroy were deeply impressed. On another occasion the Viceroy (Prefect) of Pontus threatened St. Basil, by calling him to court and saying, “I will tear out your liver.” St. Basil’s reply: “Please do, it gives me much trouble where it is.”

Mar Baselius bowed to no one. He once appealed to Pope Damasus in Rome to intervene to settle some of the quarrels in the East. Pope Damasus’ reply was, as was often the case with papal letters in those days, a bit superior sounding. Mar Baselius’ reaction is in his epistle no: 239, addressed to a fellow-bishop:

“The news of the West you know already. ... Really lofty souls, when they are courted, get haughtier than ever. ... If the Lord be propitious to us, what other thing do we need? If the anger of the Lord lasts on, what help can come to us from the arrogance of the west? ...”

Mar Baselius' great theological contributions were three:

(a) Against Arius and his disciples he established the full deity of Christ. He thus completed the work of Mar Athanasius.

(b) He established clearly the deity of the Holy Spirit.

(c) Thus he established a full doctrine of Holy Trinity as three hypostases in one ousia.

He was also a great monk who laid down the basic principles of community monasticism - a balance between prayer, study and work and the need to serve one's fellowmen by working with one's own hands. He was a great man, very learned very aristocratic, who lived in simplicity and poverty. His humility was not on the surface. He was regarded as a proud man, but his heart was truly humble.

Mar Baselius died on Jan 1, 379, about six years after Mar Athanasius had died.

VI

3. Mar Gregorios of Nazianzus (329-389)

Besides St. John who wrote the Gospel, only Mar Gregorius is given the title the “Theologian” by the Church. This may be because both St. John and St. Gregory Nazianzen have specially tried to show that the Logos, Christ, was truly God.

Mar Gregorios was one of the three Cappadocian Fathers, and a cousin and friend of the other two, namely Mar Baselius and Mar Gregorius of Nyssa. He was also a class-mate of St. Basil in Athens.

He was made a priest in 362, and ten years later was consecrated Bishop. For two years he was suffragan bishop to his father, the elder Gregorius. In 379 he went to Constantinople, the capital of the Empire, where the famous and large Church of St. Sophia was already in the hands of the Arians. He started in a small Church which belonged to the Orthodox party, and slowly by virtue of his character and preaching ability, drew the Christian crowds away from the Arian faith to the true Orthodox faith of the Church. During the great ecumenical synod of Constantinople (381) he was appointed Archbishop of that Imperial City, but retired from the Archbishopric within a few months. He went back to Nazianzus, and then to his own family estate, where he died at the age of 60.

St. Gregory was a great poet and a powerful orator. His sermons are ornate in style, but very balanced in theology, and full of biblical allusions. His five theological orations are a masterpiece. Along with St. Basil, he wrote the monastic rules for their community, and clarified the doctrine of the Trinity. He established on a sure foundation, along with St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, the full Godhead of the son and the Holy Spirit. The faith of the Church about the Holy Trinity was formulated by the three Cappadocian Fathers.

St. Gregory was a shy, retiring, and sensitive soul, who ran away from all public praise. The towering figure of St. Basil dominated his life throughout, but St. Gregory was as profound and clear in his thinking as St. Basil.

There is a true story from his student days in Athens, about how St. Basil and St. Gregory became such good friends.

In those days too, young students were just as mischievously playful as they are today. And every new student had to undergo a severe test by his fellowstudents before being too long in school.

The students usually laid hold of a new boy, and took him to their home. He is then teased and questioned and harassed until some of them weep. The students threaten the new boy with all kinds of cruelties, and if he does not know that it is all a joke, he may get quite frightened. And then he was taken to the public bath, where he was further teased and jostled.

When Mar Baselius came to Athens as a first-year student, Mar Gregorios was already a senior student. Because Mar Baselius was already a famous student before he came to Athens, the others decided to give him a particularly rough treatment in order to curb his pride. But Gregorios knew that Basil was too dignified and sensitive to take such severe teasing, and so persuaded the students to exempt Baselius from the rough treatment. Basil is supposed to have been the only student who so escaped the pranks of his fellow students.

The fairness and goodness of young Gregory can be seen in another incident which involved Basil.

The students were then organized in regional groupings, and the Armenian students decided to debate publicly with Basil in order to bring down his pride. Gregory watched the debate, saw Basil was winning easily. Gregory took pity on the poor Armenian students and took their side in the debate. Basil was now loosing the debate,

and the Armenians began to rejoice. Finally Gregory saw that Basil's pride was well - broken, and then he joined Basil's side, so that ultimately Basil won the debate. From then on Basil and Gregory became bosom pals.

St. Gregory's brother, Caesarius was an outstanding doctor, who became chief physician to the Emperor Constantius when already quite young. Caesarius' character, manner and skill combined in an unusual way to produce a man destined for great success in the world. But Caesarius was a profound Christian, and Constantius' successor, the anti Christian Julian, tried to make him into a pagan. St. Gregory fought for his brother against the Emperor who was also his class-mate at Athens.

Finally Caesarius left the Imperial court and joined Mar Baselius and Mar Gregorios in their mountain monastery. It was the presence of Dr. Caesarius which made it easy for the monastery of Mar Baselius to build their first hospitals and look after the sick in the whole surrounding area.

*

*

*

*

*

But let us get back to Mar Gregorius. His father was one of the last married bishops of the Church. He himself was an unmarried bishop, like the other Cappodocians, and all the other fathers of whom we speak in this booklet.

One day his own parish people in Nazianzus took hold of him when he was a young man of about 29 and took him to his own father, asking that he be ordained as a priest. Gregory ran away in to Pontus, where his friend Basil was already building his mountain retreat.

Some months later he returned to his parish and found all parish people very angry with him. Some accused him of being afraid to accept the priesthood, because he feared the Emperor Julian. Others said he was a coward. Yet others said that he was ambitious, and he ran away because they did not directly make him a bishop.

In his sermon explaining why he ran away, he describes the great qualities necessary for a priest. His sermon became the basis for several later books by others on the priesthood and its high responsibility.

His greatest theological contribution lay at two points. On the one hand St. Gregory Nazianzen as well as St. Gregory of Nyssa held that God could not be understood by the human mind or by any other created mind including the angels.

He can only be apprehended from what He does. And from what we now see as His work in the world, we can see that He is three in One - the Holy Trinity. This was his other contribution. He is called *Theologos* or Theologian because he showed finally that the Logos, the Word of God, was fully Theos, i.e. God. He also was a great help to St. Basil in proving that the Holy Spirit was also fully God.

The incomprehensibility of God and the Trinity may thus be regarded as two doctrines to which Mar Gregorius gave final shape.

He taught also that the Eucharist was a true sacrifice of the body and blood of our Lord and that the Blessed Virgin Mary was the bearer of God - *Theotokos*.

He became Patriarch of Constantinople for a short period during the famous synod of Constantinople in 381. He resigned soon after, returned home to breathe his last there in 389.

VII

Mar Gregorius of Nyssa (C. 330 - C. 395)

Mar Gregorius was the younger brother of Mar Baselius, and just as learned as his brother, though he never had the advantage of travelling which St. Basil had. His health was very poor from childhood.

He was born around 330 A.D., perhaps in 335. From his youth he wanted to be a priest, but in fact he became a rhetorician - the ancient equivalent of a combined professor and politician.

Later he left his profession and entered the monastery of his brother Basil. Most of his education came from his grandmother, his eldest sister, the saintly and scholarly St. Makrina.

He became bishop of Nyssa around 371. This was the time when the heresy of Arius was very strong. Many of the bishops were followers of Arius. The Arian bishops opposed Mar Gregorius and deposed him from the episcopate in 376, with the consent of the Emperor Valens.

Valens died in 378. St. Gregory was brought back from exile. He was one of the main drafters at the second Ecumenical Synod (Constantinople 381). The Emperor declared the faith of St. Gregory as the standard by which to test the beliefs of other bishops.

In his later life, Mar Gregorius travelled widely as a preacher in great demand. His teaching had many fresh and original elements. The western Church generally finds St. Gregory's teaching opposed at many points to that of Augustine, especially in the matter of original sin. They have therefore not been very keen to make use of his writings, which are actually more faithful to the True Tradition of the Church than what Augustine taught. Augustine is not recognized as

a teacher of the faith by the Eastern Churches, while St. Gregory is recognized as such both by East and West.

Both Western and Eastern theology need to relearn the teachings of this profound theologian of the Church.

Augustine regards man as totally evil. Therefore without the grace of God, man can do nothing good, and even that which appears like virtue in pagans is only a “splendid vice.” Gregory on the other hand believes that Man is created in the image of God, and therefore potentially capable of all good. But he is now fallen in sin. In Christ God has become man so that the power of sin may be destroyed. Christ unites us with himself and fills us with his own power for good. He thus transforms us into the true image of God - to become partakers in the divine nature.

Man is a sinner, according to St. Gregory, but that is not his nature. His created nature is to be like God, capable of all good. He disagrees fundamentally with Augustine who of course did not know enough Greek to read his writings.

St. Gregory also teaches that the world is good, since it is created by God. Man is made to enjoy both the earthly beauty and the heavenly joy. Augustine teaches that the world (the city of the earth) is bad, and that Man should love only heaven, the city of God. St. Gregory had said that man is made to enjoy both earthly and heavenly goodness.

St. Gregory taught that man is made to rule the creation, and that his nature is a kingly nature. He can fully exercise this nature only in union with God. St. Gregory welcomed the knowledge, the science and technology of this world, as something good and necessary for man’s growth, where as Augustine was more inclined to despise these things as mere folly before God.

Augustine was afraid of human freedom. St. Gregory taught that goodness without freedom was not virtue; that God was totally free,

and that man is also meant to be free in doing good. Augustine believed man to be completely moved by God alone in doing good. He had a very low estimate of human freedom. St. Gregory of Nyssa on the other hand wanted human freedom to develop to its full other measure in order that he may really be the perfection of all good.

St. Gregory taught that only by a life of discipline and worship we can grow into God's goodness. He taught that by the sacraments we became totally united with God in Christ and were thus transformed. He taught that the Eucharist was the true body and blood of our Lord.

VIII

Mar Ivanios the Golden - Mouthed (St. John Chrysostom)

The Prince of Preachers, this brilliant father of Church was born in Antioch. His father was a high army officer in the Praetorian Guard, who died in his infancy. He had an excellent secular education under the great pagan teacher Libanius, who taught also St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen as well as the Emperor Julian.

He wanted, mostly by the persuasion of St. Basil, when very young, to become a monk. But his mother, a widow, was sick, and he had to look after her. So he stayed at home and imposed a monastic rule upon himself.

In 374 his mother died. John was now free to be a monk. But the people of Antioch wanted to make him a bishop. But he escaped the pressure and lived as a monk of the very strict order of St. Pachomius. His health was sadly undermined by the rigour of his asceticism.

In 381, he was ordained deacon by Mar Meletios, and was attached to Bishop Flavian of Antioch. He became a very famous preacher during five years in the diaconate. The Antiocheans gave him the name Chrysostomos, which means ‘Golden-mouthed’ (the equivalent of English “silver-tongued”).

Antioch was a nominally Christian city-beautiful, with a straight and wide royal avenue traversing its four-mile length, with beautiful marble columns and golden statues on either side. But it was full of cruel, quarrelsome, slanderous, gossiping people, many of whom called themselves Christians.

St. John Chrysostom’s preaching for 12 years as a priest changed the moral values of the city. He preached mainly from the Bible. His homilies on the Bible have earned him a title as one of the greatest

Bible teachers of all history. He had a great capacity to discern deep spiritual meaning in the Bible and to apply it directly to the practical problems. The court, the clergy and the people had all become morally lazy, because their bishops had no great spiritual quality with which to inspire them. They were self-indulgent, luxury loving, quarrelsome. As the bishops, so the people.

Mar Ivanios preached also against the economic and social evils of his city. He preached against vice and extortion, corruption and bribery, black-marketing and nepotism. He enjoined the virtues of humility, honesty, simplicity, love and service.

In 398 he was chosen by the Emperor Arcadius to become Patriarch of the Imperial City, Constantinople. Mar Theophilos, the Patriarch of Alexandria had hoped for this honour, but the Emperor insisted on Father Ivanios (Ioannes and Ivanios are Greek forms of John). Mar Theophilos consecrated Mar Ivanios, both with equal unwillingness, the former because he hated Mar Ivanios, and the latter because he disliked the honour of the Patriarchate.

In Constantinople he found the patriarchal palace very similar to the Imperial palace, full of luxury and corruption. He set himself to cleaning house first. He purged the bishop's house of all the corrupt priests, monks and laymen, and changed it from a palace into a monastery.

He then began attacking the corruption in the Government and the Imperial palace. He preached against the personal conduct of the pleasure-loving Empress and the Minister of the Emperor. They became his enemies. All the rich and self-indulgent people of Constantinople became infuriated by his preaching against corruption and injustice.

Mar Theophilos of Alexandria took advantage of all these enmities and convened the Synod of the Oak (403 A.D.) which excommunicated Mar Chrysostom on 29 charges, almost all of them false.

He was soon reinstated by the Emperor. But he continued to incur the displeasure of the Empress. He was again excommunicated, on the charge that he assumed charge of a see when he had been canonically excommunicated. He was exiled and persecuted, and when his health failed, was made to walk very long distances in severe weather, and died while walking, falling on the road, breathing his last in 407 and uttering the words “Glory be to the Lord of all for everything.”

Mar Ivanios was not a great theologian, but he was an outstanding preacher and bible teacher. He was a man of great personal holiness. He, along with Mar Athanasius, are the two most popular Eastern fathers among western people, probably because they are easier to understand than the other more profound fathers.

Theologically, his greatest teaching was on the Priesthood. We give below a few quotations:

“When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the High Priest (bishop) standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being coloured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you not at once transported to heaven and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with soul naked and mind pure look round upon heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh the loving kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father is at that moment held in our hands, and gives himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace him - which they do all of them, with their eyes ... Anyone who considers how much it means to be able, in his humanity, still entangled in flesh and blood, to approach that blessed and immaculate being, will see clearly how

great is the honour which the grace of the spirit has
bestowed on priests.”*

He also says clearly that the Priest has been given an authority higher than that given to the angels - that of forgiving sins, of binding and loosing something on earth and thereby binding and loosing in heaven.

* St. John Chrysostom. Six Books on the Priesthood. Tr. Graham Neville. London SPCK, 1964, pp. 70-71.

IX

Mar Kurilos of Alexandria

At the Synod of the Oak in 403, when Mar Ivanios Chrysostomos was excommunicated, Patriarch Mar Theophilos of Alexandria was accompanied by his nephew, Kurilos, who later became his successor as Patriarch of Alexandria.

We know very little about his early life. He was born in Alexandria around 378, and must have received an excellent classical education in the Christian academy in Alexandria. The clarity and precision of his mind are quite impressive. He has laid the foundation for our understanding of how the human and divine natures of Christ are united to form one single nature.

In 412, when Patriarch Mar Theophilos died, even though the Government tried to get their own man elected, the people chose Mar Kurilos. He was merciless in his opposition to Jews and heretics. The Government chief (Prefect) was opposed to his election, and became his great enemy. But the monks of the Egyptian desert were all on Mar Kurilos' side. And they were very powerful in their influence and capacity to use any means including violence to protect the Orthodox faith.

His biggest fight was with the Patriarch of Constantinople, however. That Patriarch was a heretic, none other than Nestorius.

We are just beginning to understand what Nestorians actually taught regarding the Person of Christ. The text-books say that Nestorius taught that Christ was two persons with two natures - a divine person and a human person. It is quite clear that Nestorius rejected the word *Theotokos* as applied to the Mother of our Lord. This word means "God bearer," and affirms that the child in the Blessed Virgin Mary's womb was God and man from the very conception - it was not the case that Mary conceived a human child who later became the bearer of God.

Nestorius attacked the word *Theotokos* and wanted to use only *Christo-tokos*, Christ-bearer. It was his attack of the word *Theotokos* rather than his belief in two persons that caused the Church to condemn him as a heretic. Perhaps Nestorius did not fully realize what he was teaching; and he was Patriarch of the imperial City of Constantinople. His rejection of the *Theotokos* formula implied a belief in two persons, though probably Nestorius never actually taught that Christ was two persons. He was afraid, however, that the *Theotokos* formula denied the human soul of Christ, and suspected, perhaps without full understanding, that those who hold to this formula believed that Christ was simply the logos and human flesh without a human soul - which was very near to the heresy of Apollinarius. Nestorius attributed such a heretical belief to Mar Kurilos of Alexandria. This was a complete misunderstanding. Mar Kurilos believed that the Word of God, the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, assumed unto himself a full human nature - body, soul and spirit.

Nestorius also taught that the Church was wrong in believing that it was the Second Person of the Trinity who suffered on the cross and tasted death in the flesh. He insisted that only the human nature died. Mar Kurilos insisted that the Logos was the subject of all the actions of Christ and therefore we cannot deny that the Logos experienced everything through the human soul in Christ.

Nestorius was not a clear thinker. He therefore denied all the sacred teaching of the Church which he could not understand. If he were just a private individual, his unclear teaching could have gone unnoticed. But as Patriarch of Constantinople, he had no right to deny the faith of the Church. Mar Kurilos therefore took the initiative to question Nestorius, and got his heresy condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.). St. Cyril's formula was

“God the Logos did not come into a man, but he truly became Man, while remaining God.”

Nestorius taught that the Logos “indwelt” the man Jesus. St. Cyril regarded this as too loose a relationship between God and Man in Christ. God did not simply dwell in Jesus as in a temple, but Jesus Christ was God become man without ceasing to be God. And therefore Christ has only one nature - “the one nature of the Word of God Incarnate,” which is both fully human and fully divine, but cannot be called two natures, because they have united to form one single divine - human nature of God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ.

Mar Kurilos knew the distinction between deity and humanity - it is clear that the former is Creator and the latter is creature. But in Christ Jesus the Creator has become the creature without ceasing to be the Creator. That is the miracle and the mystery of the Incarnation.

We are not “monophysites” when we thus follow the teaching of our father and father of the Universal Church Mar Kurilos. *Monos* means in Latin only. ‘Monophysite’ means believing in one nature only (presumably the divine nature). We believe in one united divine-human nature, not in one of the two natures only. We are neither diophysites nor monophysites, but “*mia-physites*” (*mia* in Greek means one). We do not deny the human nature of Christ, but believe that one Person has only one nature, and that Christ has one divine - human nature, the divine nature being His in eternity and the human nature by the Incarnation. We cannot believe, however that the two natures are separate or separable. They form one single nature. This is the teaching of Mar Kurilos, which may be summarised as follows:

- (a) The nature of Christ cannot be divided into two after the union by Incarnation.
- (b) The actions of Christ cannot be attributed to two different subjects - one divine and one human. It is one and the same Christ who performs miracles and also hungers and thirsts.
- (c) The Word of God is hypostatically united to the

humanity, which was assumed, and the two operate together, the Word being always the subject.

The controversy between Nestorius and Mar Kurilos was settled finally at the Council of Ephesus in 431 when the teaching of Nestorius was condemned, and he was “dispossessed of all dignity in the Church.”

St. Cyril is the touchstone of Christology for East and West, for those who believe in two natures and those who believe in one united divine - human nature.

St. Cyril died in 444.